

Mary Justino - PIO extraordinaire

By Shirley Shaw

We've grown accustomed to seeing her on TV when a newsworthy event occurs in her area - Mary Justino, Public Information Officer for the Clay County Sheriff's Office. Although her duties have been amended somewhat by her new boss, she is still the warm, accommodating, efficient young woman the media depend on for information.

She related, as an example, her role in the events surrounding the recent discovery of a woman's body in the St. John's River. When she received the page, she immediately went to the scene, knowing the media would be responding en masse.

She worked with the deputies to determine where to put the crime scene tape, where to park the media, how far they would be allowed to go near the crime scene and who would talk to the reporters. Previously, she would have done the on-camera interview, but now the officers closely involved with the crime would give details and answer questions.

"I coordinate everything,

but I like to see the people who work the case get credit for what they do. Even if I give the officers' names in my interview, many times that information is edited out, so this way the public sees the



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— Mary Justino

ones directly involved."

Mary clearly understands how the media operates; she was Assignment Manager/Editor at WTLV-TV in Jacksonville for seven years. She loved her job there, but when the opportunity arose six years ago to work in Green Cove Springs, eliminating the lengthy, aggravating rush-hour commute each day, she jumped at the chance. And it's worked out fine. She has more time to spend with her husband, Rob, a teacher and coach at Middleburg High School, and her two young sons.

She likes the close-knit

community atmosphere of her town, which she says holds her accountable to do her job well. "People know you when you walk down the street, or eat out on Friday night, or go to church on Sunday. They

Victim's Advocates are regularly called to respond to scenes and to assist in our follow-up meetings with victims.

"Also, CCSO Sgt. Ken Murray has been working with me to increase the publication and distribution of victims' rights materials. We are getting more of this very important information into the hands of our deputies and detectives so that they have the materials they need to educate the victims they encounter every day."

She emphasized her concern for victims. "No matter what information I'm putting out to the media, I always ask myself, 'What will the victim think about this when he/she reads it or sees it on TV. Will it expose the victim to undue trauma?' I always keep that in mind. There's a fine line between releasing information that is public record (and by law we have to release it) and releasing it in a way that's sensitive to the people involved. And you can do both. I frequently remind a reporter, 'Here's the information you request, but please keep in mind there is

recognize you because you went to school with them or their brother works with your sister. And they always know more about what's going on in a situation than I do, or that I can say."

Ensuring victims' rights

Mary expressed her appreciation for the Justice Coalition and its role in helping victims. "We don't have a full-time victim's advocate; however, we work closely with the affiliated agencies in our area who do - Quigley House Domestic Violence and Sex Assault Center, the State Attorney's Office, etc. Their

someone on the other end of this information that you're going to write or talk about."

"At the end of the day when it comes to the work I do, I always want to know I've done my best to protect the victim."

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- Duval County Courthouse
- Jacksonville Public Libraries
- Police Memorial Building
- Sonny's Real Pit Bar-B-Q
- Office Depot
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- Most Major Downtown Buildings
- Jacksonville Area:**
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- Larry's Giant Subs
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